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# RACISM, RACIAL DISCRIMINATION, XENOPHOBIA AND ALL FORMS OF DISCRIMINATION

## Written statement*/ submitted by the International Indian Treaty Council, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[31 January 2000]

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*/ This written statement is issued, unedited, as received from the submitting non-governmental organization(s).

The Commission is aware of the racist practice throughout the United States of using Indians as "mascots" for sports teams. The International Indian Treaty Council will share with this Commission the following excerpts from a statement recently received from a young Indigenous student from the town of Wasilla, Alaska, with reference to this practice:

"Nationwide, sports programs in schools, universities, and professional sports programs have used Native Americans as their mascots. These mascots include: Redskins, Indians, Braves, and Warriors. These mascots are racist in every form. Wasilla High School and Wasilla Middle School have these racist mascots.

"These sports programs claim to be honoring Native Americans, and say that without their recognition, the rest of the nation would forget that Native Americans ever existed. First off, the Native culture will always exist, and second, Native Americans are not honored when there is racism in the way. There is no honor in being remembered as savages who ran wild killing white people with tomahawks.

"I graduated Wasilla High School in 1997, and I was very uncomfortable with the things I saw...I saw students doing the tomahawk chop during hockey games, during Homecoming, I saw a man sitting on a horse dressed up as what people think an Native American is supposed to look like, and I saw a female student running around in a mascot costume. On mascot's head was a single feather, but that was not as near noticeable as the mascot's giant nose. My ancestors didn't wear feather headdresses, instead my great-great-great-grandmother wore a rope around her neck, tied to a tree by her white kidnapper for the rest of her life.

"Speaking of female Native Americans, I'd like to clear up the meaning of "squaw". People assume that male Indians were called "braves" or "warriors" , while the females were called "squaws" . I have even heard this term used to for female athlete Wasilla High School students. The word squaw comes from an Algonquin word referring to the female genital area. The white traders shortened the word to "squaw" and called the Native women this. This here is not only racism, it is sexual harassment.

"[The term] " Redskins" also has a different meaning. People think that term comes from the Native people's skin color, this is not so. In the 19th century, trappers would kill Indians for trade. They would trade animal skins, and these scalps. Some of the white women did not like this term scalp, so the trappers started calling the scalps "Redskins", referring to the bloody mess that happened after the trappers cut off the scalps of the Indians.

"This is clearly racist, but even in today's society, people have not bothered to educate themselves because the American public will wear clothing that said "Washington Redskins" on it, or should [it say] "Washington bloody scalps" .

" Wasilla High School's goals and philosophy in the handbook states "In partnership with parents and other community members and agencies, the staff of Wasilla High School will assist engaged learners in development of respectful attitudes towards themselves, others, and the

environment.." Having this mascot, respects neither the student nor others, so therefore, Wasilla High School's goals are not met. Ignorance is put in its place, and that hurts the student. Instead of being friends and putting a stop to stereotypes, when a student looks upon Native American, the Native will be called a drunk, dirty, and or like I was told, "quit living off my money."

"Wasilla High School is not alone in the mascot situation. A lot of other states are being challenged to end this racist problem, and many are putting a stop to it. Wasilla's mascots maybe a tradition, but it goes against everything I believe the schools want their students to learn.

"Please no longer group the Native American people with beasts like moose, objects like stars, and fantasy like knights. The Native American people are the only ethnic group of people used as mascots. How would you feel if your culture was mocked? How would you feel if across the nation, people were mocking your own culture as for the sake of a sport? High school tradition and sports are nothing compared to the Creator of this Universe has given us, the right to be respected and accepted as a people."

A more eloquent and moving statement on the daily indignities and injuries of racism against Indigenous Peoples cannot be found. Lamentably, the indignity of a developing child, harm enough, is not the only evil of racism. Dominant societal attitudes that demean, pervasive racist postures that dehumanize, also serve to justify the physical, social and economic exploitation of Indigenous Peoples in almost every country where Indigenous Peoples have managed to survive, not just in the United States.

With the advent of Globalization and so-called "free trade", another racist practice, identified in the United States as " environmental racism" is spreading at an alarming rate throughout the world. Environmental racism is the imposition of disproportionate impacts of environmental despoliation on a marginalized racial group. The effects on racially marginalized communities, which in the US include Afro-American and Latino communities as well as Indigenous Peoples, encompass birth defects and stillborn babies, cancers and other chronic deadly diseases.

The IITC notes with approval that the National Environmental Justice Advisory Committee, an national advisory body to the Administrator of the United States Environmental Protection Agency, found that the adoption of the United Nations Draft Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples is an urgent environmental justice concern. At its November, 1999 session, NEJAC recommended that the Administrator immediately communicate with the US Department of State that the United States support the adoption of the UN Draft Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples without change or amendment. This same body, whose mandate is to advise the Administrator of US EPA on matters of environmental racism and environmental justice, also recommended to the EPA Administrator that the United States Department of State, as well as the United States Trade Representative be bound by the same rules regarding environmental justice and human rights observance as all other Agencies of the United States.

The Draft Declaration and globalization are urgent environmental justice concerns for the United Nations as well. Shell Oil Company's Ogoni oil fields, Rio Tinto's Papua New Guinea and Lehir Island gold mines, the increased use of pesticides in industrialized agriculture in Mexico,

and deforestation throughout the world, exemplify governmental tolerance of trans-national environmental racism and resultant massive human rights violations against Indigenous Peoples. Some governments have dared to suggest that massive pollution of Indigenous lands and Peoples are " national sacrifices" for much needed " national development." Would they "sacrifice" their own dominant racial groups? In truth, the majority of the inhabitants of many such states continue to live in extreme poverty in spite of the tremendous toll Indigenous Peoples suffer.

There is an inverse proportion of distance to the detriments and benefits of " national development. " Those whose lives and cultures are closest to the source of wealth, increasingly Indigenous Peoples, suffer direct and massive detriment, while those who live the farthest away, primarily in the "North," reap of the benefits and feel none of the pain. Our Mother Earth cannot withstand these abuses, and the distance between the benefit and the pain is growing ever closer. The pollution of racism is now also polluting the racist.

The International Indian Treaty Council commends the Committee on the Elimination of all Forms of Racial Discrimination, the Treaty Monitoring Body of CERD, for recognizing that the rights of Indigenous Peoples to their lands and resources are matters within its competence. The Committee found that Australian legislation concerning extinguishment of Native Title raised concerns under CERD Article 2 and 5. The Committee called upon the state party to address these concerns as a matter of utmost urgency and placed the matter on its agenda under its early warning and urgent action procedures, to be reviewed again at its fifty-fifth session. (CERD/C/54/Misc.40/Rev.2, 18 March, 1999).

The IITC calls upon this Commission, and its various subsidiary organs, in particular all human rights Treaty Monitoring Bodies, as a matter of utmost urgency to do as the CERD Committee and the Human Rights Committee have done, to directly recognize and address the rights of Indigenous Peoples as Peoples, so that the deadly evils of racism and discrimination finally be brought to task. In particular, we call upon this Commission to finally and forever cease its own discrimination by recognizing that the right of Self Determination of Peoples is a right to be enjoyed by Indigenous Peoples, and adopting the UN Draft Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples without change or amendment.

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